

Problems building up on Wildwood beaches Sand from northern neighbors extending city strands

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WILDWOOD - It's beach replenishment by proxy.

Other towns along New Jersey's coastline beg and plead for state and federal dollars to pump fresh sand onto their eroding beaches. After some arm-twisting, the government sometimes obliges and sand is pumped in to cover exposed geotubes or restore decimated dunes.

Then, as if on cue, a powerful storm comes along sending much of that precious sand toward Five Mile Beach and the shores of Wildwood - where it piles up.

Thanks to Mother Nature and some poorly placed jetties, Wildwood, which did none of the begging and pleading, has all the beach it can handle and more.

A beach that measures 1,584 feet from the Boardwalk to the water's edge has its pluses. Sunbathers have ample room to spread out beneath the summer sun and kite flyers can run the length of five football fields to send their kites soaring.

But for Wildwood, it also means there is too much beach between the end of the city's outfall lines and the water's edge.

Glenn Balmer, a supervisor with the city's sewer utility, estimated there is anywhere from 500 to 800 feet of sand between the end of the city's nine outfall pipes and the Atlantic Ocean.

The pipes, designed to channel water out of the city's streets from Pacific Avenue east and into the ocean, come up short.

Each day, crews head to the beach with their backhoes and spend two to three hours unearthing the ends of the pipes to allow the water collected in them to flow.

As the winds whipped up the sand Thursday, backhoe operator Rick Mascio worked to clear the passage leading to the outfall line at Youngs Avenue.

He would dig about six feet, removing clumps of sand blocking the pipe. The backhoe is used to pop open the pipes, sending the water down a man-made trench out to shore.

Balmer said the man-hours and money spent clearing the lines are just two of the problems caused by a growing beach. There also are issues of safety, health and flooding on city streets.

The end of each pipe is marked with a yellow sign that reads "Caution Rainwater Outfall Line" and lined with orange fencing. But children still like to play there, Balmer said.

The water coming from the streets also carries with it nonpoint source pollution that has no place on a bathing beach, and during a heavy rain, streets flood as crews try to unblock the lines to clear busy sewer pipes.

This week, the city offered support for beach-replenishment programs designed to help its fellow coastal communities, but city officials asked again for help with what is literally a growing problem.

"I don't have a problem with beach replenishment, but the state and federal government won't recognize Wildwood's problem," Commissioner Ernie Troiano Jr. said.

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the beaches here grow 14 feet per year on average, with some areas showing growth estimated at 30 to 40 feet per year. The biggest example of shoreline accretion here actually was at 10th Avenue in North Wildwood, where the beach grew 38 feet per year between 1940 and 1977.

Spokesman Rich Chlan said the Army Corps of Engineers is examining Wildwood's problem as part of a feasibility study that encompasses Hereford Inlet to Cape May Inlet. That study is scheduled for completion in 2006.

The design phase would follow, meaning it would be many years before a physical solution is in place, Chlan said.

One option being considered is "taking surplus material from Wildwood and Wildwood Crest" and placing it on the North Wildwood beaches, Chlan said, adding that that option also is years away.

In their own study, the city's engineers at Remington, Vernick & Walberg offered five possible solutions including combining the outfall lines into one or two main lines and then building a pumping station on the beach to discharge the water into the ocean.

Other suggestions included extending all the outfall lines into the ocean or grading the beach and building dunes to relocate the mean high tide line closer to the outfalls.

The price tags for the various options range from \$6.1 million to \$10.5 million.

Whatever the final choice, it is certain nothing will happen in the near future, and Mascio will be back tomorrow with his backhoe.

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